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ON THE COVER

Rose by Wendy Red Star

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on April 15, 2026.

At first glance this month's cover image may strike readers as a decorative Native American motif because of the way the horse is stylized and done in solid color with turquoise zigzags. But the opposite of decorative art is art that requires contemplation not just an appreciation of appearance. And what Wendy Red Star has created with *Rose* is an offer to contemplate an image rich with the stories of the Apsáalooke (Crow) people.

The artist says she likes to "spark people to look further." As a case in point, notice the rope around the horse's neck. It signifies an animal that was captured in the traditional Apsáalooke activity of "horse getting." Not horse *stealing* as Red Star's grandfather admonished when, as a child, she used the wrong word. It was the dream of warriors to be ranked as a chief. One of the four requirements was to slip into an enemy's camp and make off with a horse tethered outside a tipi. The best were kept near the center of the village, so it was an act of outstanding bravery and stealth in the face of danger.

Picture one of those warriors escaping with the prize horse, galloping home across the dark prairie, heart drumming in time with the pounding hooves and fear of pursuit, yet surrounded by the silence of a star-filled night. Honor and status would be the rewards for his audacity and skill. The horse itself was often gifted to family or a senior tribal member.

There is more to tell about *Rose*. The lower right corner of the image contains writing. It says "Lakota Blemmingham Ledger 19th Century" and "In the spirit of Greenskin." "Lakota" refers to a neighboring tribe from which the horse might have been taken. Imprisoned warriors were given pages from account ledgers to draw on. Many did, sketching horse raids, battles, and stories. They were eventually compiled and exhibited. The Blemmingham Ledger Book was one of them. Red Star has an ancestor, Greenskin, who was an accomplished "horse-getter." *Rose* is a reimagined version of a ledger drawing by this relative. The yellow and blue surround is meant to evoke the marbleized cover of an old ledger book.

If this makes it sound as though horses were central to both the Apsáalooke and to Red Star, they were and still are. Indeed, she grew up on the tribal reservation in Montana wanting to be a horse trainer. She found that her thoughts were visuospatial in nature, perhaps a reflection her dyslexia but also the way her tribe looked at their world. She was always aware of local colors, patterns, symbols, and objects and the appearance of the landscape and vegetation. But she did not conceptualize them as "art" in the Western sense. Similarly, a high school art teacher encouraged realistic representation, which did not jive with her own orientation. Yet Red Star's mother wanted her to go to college. So she decided on Montana State University in Bozeman and studied graphic design. Once there, however, she discovered her affinity for sculpture and also took classes in native studies. It turned out that Bozeman was on old Apsáalooke territory, which was comforting. Red Star furthered her development with a Master of Fine Art degree from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Along the way, she has learned how to turn her appreciation of native life into art. She loves Modern art, but inspiration comes from her ancestors, not from European influences. Her purpose is to create a living archive that incorporates tribal material and remains accessible to the Apsáalooke community. Members can find their past through Red Star's work. She achieves this by using many kinds of material and media from photography to glass blowing. Learning and experiment are valued and the choice depends on the specific concept.

Now based in Portland, Oregon, Red Star has shown at galleries across the country, and her work is held in public collections including the Guggenheim Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, and the National Museum of the American Indian. Asked if she has any "takeaway" message for the *American Psychologist* community, she replied that her work is a gateway. We can enter as far as we wish and there are different layers to explore. Sounds like an invitation psychologists can appreciate.

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Art Editor

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